

RARE DISEASES OF PUBLIC HEALTH SIGNIFICANCE

DISEASE REPORTING

In Washington

Rare diseases of public health significance are defined as diseases or conditions of general public health concern, which are not ordinarily seen in the state of Washington. This includes, but is not limited to, viral hemorrhagic fevers, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, other tickborne diseases, and communicable diseases that would be of general public concern if detected in Washington. Information on selected diseases is included below.

Purpose of reporting and surveillance

- To identify rare diseases associated with travel.
- To identify cases of new or uncommon infections to understand the epidemiology of emerging diseases in Washington State.

Reporting requirements

- Health care providers: **immediately notifiable to Local Health Jurisdiction**
- Hospitals: **immediately notifiable to Local Health Jurisdiction**
- Laboratories: no requirements for reporting
- Local health jurisdictions: notifiable to DOH Communicable Disease Epidemiology within 7 days of case investigation completion or summary information required within 21 days

Coccidioidomycosis

Coccidioidomycosis is a respiratory infection due to the fungus *Coccidioides immitis*, found in dusty soil in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, chest pain, and muscle aches; some infected people have no symptoms but rare disseminated infection occurs. At least 21 members of a Washington group that did construction work in northern Mexico in 1996 developed coccidioidomycosis.

Dengue fever

Dengue is a tropical, mosquito-borne infection caused by several serotypes of dengue virus. Dengue fever results in headache, joint pains, gastrointestinal symptoms, and rash. Dengue hemorrhagic fever, a more severe illness, may occur with repeated infections. Imported cases of dengue fever were reported in Washington in 1999 (six cases), 1992 (4 cases), and one each in 1995, 1994, and 1991.

Babesiosis

Protozoal *Babesia* species are transmitted by ticks. Infection is characterized by fever, hemolytic anemia and kidney failure. The first locally acquired case was reported in 1991 and was caused by a unique *Babesia* strain designated WA-1. In 1994, transfusion-associated babesiosis caused by WA-1 was documented in a blood recipient in Washington, and the asymptomatic donor was found to be the source.

Ehrlichiosis

Ehrlichiosis, a rickettsial infection caused by various *Ehrlichia* species, takes several forms. Symptoms, including fever, headache, body aches, and nausea, range from mild to severe. Ticks are the presumed vector. Ehrlichiosis has been reported from northeast, southern and midwestern United States and in Washington.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)

RMSF is a tick-borne rickettsial infection characterized by high fever, chills, headache, muscle pain, and often a characteristic rash. In this country it is most common in southern regions, not the Rocky Mountains. Mortality may be high if treatment is delayed and can be 25% without treatment. Most Washington cases occur after travel to other states. Two of the three 1999 Washington cases had exposure in the state; one case was fatal.

